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SUBJECT: TFIZ01: FUEL SITUATION IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

SUMMARY

1. Concern about the supply of cooking gas and related fuels for the southern region of Iraq continues. The Basrah refinery, the reported primary source of LPG cooking gas for most of the south, is damaged and not expected to be on line for at least a month. An effort to provide bottled gas from Kuwait to Umm Qasr, while successful, given the logistical challenges, demonstrated the unfeasibility of launching a wider effort for the rest of the southern region. Meanwhile, reports from several governorates in the south describe dwindling domestic supplies from a couple weeks to three or four days to none.

2. There are increasing reports of the removal of urban tree stocks in several locations as well as reports of increased incidence of burns attributed to people attempting to cook with firewood and other fuels with which they are unfamiliar. Planning efforts to acquire LPG from outside the area are hindered by a concurrent lack of appropriate trucking to move the gas. End Summary.

BACKGROUND TO COOKING GAS IN IRAQ

3. In Iraqi homes, the primary fuel for cooking in most Iraqi homes is with Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), which consists of 75 percent propane and 25 percent butane (Note: this combination is reportedly used because it is more stable than pure propane in the extreme heat of Iraq. End note.) Before the war, families regularly traded-in empty bottles for filled bottles at their local gas stations, which are located throughout most communities. The average bottle contained 12 kilograms (KGs) of LPG lasting approximately 2 months. These stations were supplied by trucks that regularly brought newly filled bottles, taking the empties back to bottling plants for refilling/recharging. An undetermined number of recharging plants are located around the region; one of the larger plants is reported to be in Al Kut in Wasit Governorate. LPG for the south was supplied to these recharging plants by truck from the refinery in Basrah. Further north, the LPG was reportedly supplied from Baghdad, reaching Baghdad by pipeline from the Al Baiji refinery in the north.

LACK OF COOKING GAS

4. In its earliest meetings with the newly-formed town council in Umm Qasr in mid April, the DART first heard of the need for cooking gas. Around the same time, the first reports came in from International Medical Corps (IMC), from its assessments of health care centers in the southern region, of growing incidences of burns caused by people attempting to cook over open fires -- a practice with which most urban Iraqis are unfamiliar. The Umm Qasr city council members complained that people were beginning to trim and cut down the few trees in the city, and the evidence of this practice is being noted with growing frequency. At the Infrastructure meeting in the Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) on 28 April, a returning assessment team reported that people were cutting down the trees in the medians on Umm Qasr's parkways.

5. In An Nasiriyah, the Irish NGO, GOAL, described the dwindling cooking fuel situation as "dire". On 1 May, GOAL reported that propane supplies in An Nasiriyah were virtually "non-existent" and that kerosene supplies are

"perilously low". GOAL also reported on 23 April that a number of people looted a propane factory in An Nasiriyah by breaking the pipes and manually opening the valves to fill bottles. As a result of this looting, a lethal mixture of sulphur and vapor remains in the tank, which could easily explode. Another incident of looting occurred on 29 April, when looters again manually broke open a main pipeline valve. This time, the pressurized pipeline exploded, killing two people and seriously burning two more.

16. Coalition forces in Al Kut reported a near-riot during an attempt to distribute the remaining bottles at a facility there. Save the Children reported that during their small-scale gas bottle distribution in Umm Qasr (see below) people drove in from as far as Basrah asking to buy gas. The DART, in its most recent assessment report from Anbar Governorate, noted similar problems.

DONATED BOTTLED GAS FROM KUWAIT

17. In response to the request from the Umm Qasr city council, actions by the DART led to a joint effort by Salvation Army, who procured and transported bottles of gas donated by the Government of Kuwait to Umm Qasr, and Save the Children, who provided organization assistance for the bottles' distribution through public distribution system agents in the town. In addressing the needs of the 30,000-plus people of Umm Qasr, this distribution was highly successful. Relying on community participation, this distribution is one of the first distributions in the south not marred by out-of-control crowds and looting of supplies. However, the associated high costs (over USD 1,200 for each of the seven trucks needed to transport the 4,300 bottles from Kuwait) and excessive person-days required to implement this effort (nearly two weeks of full-time organizational work), also demonstrated its limited feasibility for broader application in the region.

ASSUMED BROAD-SCALE NEEDS

18. A request was sent out earlier this week to Coalition forces, NGOs, and town councils asking for current estimates of fuel and related fuel transport needs. So far, no responses to this request have come back. At this time, the region's only town council known to have a unit specifically dedicated to fuel is in An Nasiriyah. GOAL has assigned one civil engineer fulltime to this unit. Other DART partners have been encouraged to support the establishment of similar units in the towns where they work.

19. A recent report by the GOAL engineer estimates the daily need in the area of An Nasiriyah at approximately 11,000 bottles per day for a population estimated at approximately 800,000. By extension, the daily need for the four southern governorates of Basrah, Thi Qar, Missan, and Muthana, is estimated to be in the area of 68,000 bottles per day for a population of five million people. Include the next six adjoining governorates to the northwest, and this number doubles. GOAL, in its report, states that with some minor repairs they could get some of the damaged bottling plants back into basic operation and if coupled with production from existing plants and if bottles were only three-quarters filled, An Nasiriyah facilities could possibly meet immediate local demand. The problem, however, is lack of gas to fill the bottles. During the 28 April Infrastructure Meeting at the HOC, it was reported that the Basrah Refinery's facilities for LPG are damaged and may not be operational for another month.

ACQUIRING OUTSIDE SOURCES OF LPG

10. Unconfirmed reports state that Al Baigi's LPG facilities are operable and serving the north. Previously, LPG was piped to Baghdad where it was put in tankers and trucked as far south as Al Kut where there is a major bottle manufacture and charging plant. The boundary between the Al Baigi system and the LPG supply system from Basrah is unclear, but it is a reasonable assumption that distribution from this northern system could alleviate a portion of the problem. The Kuwaiti National Oil Company has indicated its ability and willingness to provide LPG to the south. A private contracting company also has offered to procure LPG and bring it by barge into Umm Qasr. However, in all instances there are problems related to trucking. The Kuwaitis have stated that they will not allow their LPG tankers to travel into Iraq because of their limited supply of trucks and the instability in Iraq. The Kuwaiti National Oil Company indicated, however, that they would allow Iraqi trucks into Kuwait for filling, if they passed routine Kuwaiti safety inspections. In response to this offer, efforts were made to locate Iraqi LPG tankers. In the course

of this effort, a larger problem is the general absence of any significant numbers of Iraqi fuel transport trucks of any kind.

DIFFICULTIES IDENTIFYING TRUCKING STOCK

¶11. Determining the whereabouts and status of Iraq's fuel trucking stock has been frustrating and confusing. Coalition trucks are reportedly distributing diesel to gas stations around the country, but the scope of this effort is not currently understood. Early responses to a Request for Information (RFI) to Coalition forces around the country indicates that Coalition units also are looking for trucks. No reports of identified stocks have been received in response to the RFI.

¶12. GOAL located only three trucks in the whole of An Nasiriyah, only two of which are operable (Note: GOAL further calculated a need for at least 20, 36,000 liter trucks to meet local demand. End Note.) A Mercy Corps International assessment team reported from Al Kut, where there was thought to be a large stock of gas trucks, that all the trucks had been taken back to the central trucking yards in Dowrah, near Baghdad, and to Al Hillah. However, Coalition forces report that there are trucks in Al Kut and they planned to take a representative from Salvation Army there on 28 April, to try and find and assess the trucks. There is no information on the outcome of that effort, but GOAL asked for clarification on a rumor they heard of eight tankers in route from Al Kut to Kuwait. Concurrently, an unconfirmed, verbal report from the HOC says the truck yards in Dowrah are empty or looted.

¶13. According to the United Nations Joint Logistics Center (UNJLC), much of the national trucking stock has been "privatized" by the drivers, repainted, and put into private use. To further confuse things, Save the Children reports that during their distribution, a driver with a full truck of bottled gas showed up in Umm Qasr trying to sell the gas. Who the driver worked for or where the gas came from is not known.

CONCLUSION

¶14. A brief informal meeting was held on 28 April between representatives from the UNJLC Fuel Planning Cell, the U.S. Corps of Engineers, and the DART. When all the accumulated bits of information were reviewed in their entirety there was consensus that the problem may be far more serious than some had earlier considered. All agreed that the problem, if not quickly addressed, could have significant negative impact on the environment, public health, and society-at-large (e.g., exacerbating social unrest). To address the problem, increased efforts are required on a number of fronts including:

- Raised prioritization for bringing LPG production facilities in Basrah into operation;
- A more robust effort on the part of Coalition forces to locate and inventory remaining Iraqi national trucking stock, with particular attention to finding remaining LPG tankers;
- An accelerated effort at the town council level to determine immediate emergency fuel trucking needs and related storage capacities, and to plan for internal distribution; and
- An effort to determine the viability of contracting outside trucking (e.g., Saudi Arabia) coupled with importation of LPG.

JONES